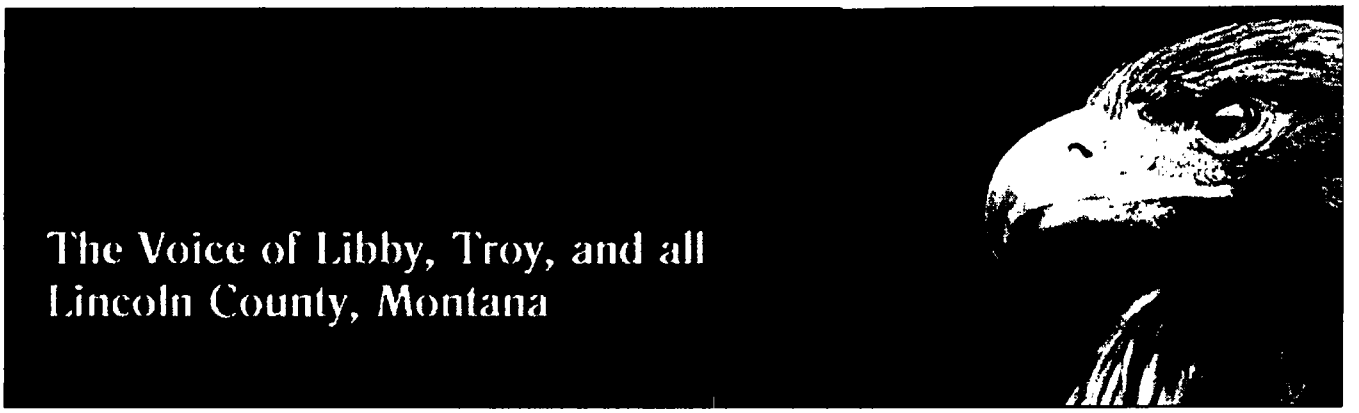

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LATAG Press Release 1-08

When will we receive a clean bill of health?

PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Helen Andries
Phone: (406) 295-5581

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, January 22, 2008

From Libby Area Technical Assistance Group (LATAG)
Written by Phillip Erquiaga

In speaking with community members LATAG is often asked about Health Risk Assessment. The predominant question is, 'when will we receive a clean bill of health?'

LATAG has a responsibility to the community to aid in understanding the issues; in turn the community has a responsibility to convey its need for understanding of these issues.

So what is the Health Risk Assessment? EPA defines this as, "A risk assessment is a formal, step-by-step, scientific process for quantifying health risks to residents, workers, and those here purely for recreation. It uses standardized tools, formats, and scientifically accepted assumptions. Assessments are led by experienced toxicologists and must undergo rigorous review and scrutiny."

Several questions that need to be answered are, 'what are the health risks, and how do we KNOW we are on the right path to a clean bill of heath for future generations?' The answer today is, We Don't KNOW! So the next questions are, 'how will we know and when will we know?'

The only way this will EVER be answered is through sampling of air, soils, and properties; analytical studies; toxicological studies; epidemiological studies; then establishing a dosimetry model from these efforts. So the real question is, 'where are we on these studies?'

Sampling has been in progress for several years. It is comprised of outdoor ambient air sampling, indoor and outdoor Activity-Based Sampling (ABS), and other current and

possible future sampling projects as needed. The initial elements of outdoor ambient air sampling in and around Libby were completed in 2007, and will continue into the future focusing more on areas outside Libby. A preliminary full spectrum sampling of areas extending 7 miles radially from the mine have occurred and are currently being analyzed. These preliminary mine perimeter samplings could conclude a need for additional sampling around the mine. The Activity-Based Sampling (ABS), in progress since 2007, should be completed the summer of 2008. ABS is the process of going into homes and performing activities that match the activities of a normal family. For example; playing, watching television, sleeping, vacuuming, and playing or working in the yard. Additional sampling will be done as required to improve the data.

Analytical Studies focus on determining that data collection and analysis, currently being performed or that will be performed in the future, will in fact provide the answers needed. This includes how we collect and analyze soil samples, vermiculite fiber size distribution, ambient air collection method verification, and more. These should be completed in the 2nd quarter of 2009.

Epidemiological Studies will take the information collected from folks, known to have been exposed to Libby Amphibole, who currently suffer from a related disease, and those who have passed away as a result of a related disease, then compile this data into a central database which will be operated by the Center for Asbestos Related Disease (CARD), here in Libby. This information includes charted information, biopsy information, serum sample information, etc. to establish a picture of the effects of Libby Amphibole on humans.

This data will be combined, through collaborative efforts and agreements, from CARD, other groups, agencies, universities, and from other sites, such as the Marysville, Ohio processing facility. Historical data, current data, and follow-up data will be analyzed and combined with sampling data and toxicology data to establish the criteria for acceptable exposure levels. We should start seeing results from the epidemiological studies by late 2009 to early 2010.

Toxicology Studies focus on the effects of and potency of Libby Amphibole Asbestos on exposed persons, and treatment options for folks exposed. Toxicology studies will be performed on animals, most likely mice. And will focus on the establishing acceptable reference concentrations for chronic inhalation exposure related to both non-cancer and cancer related illnesses. Basically this will answer the question, 'how much of this stuff will make us sick?'

The big questions facing scientists are, 'How do we expose the mice, should the fiber be left in its more natural state, should it be separated into different fiber sizes, should other structures (besides fibers) be studied, and should the difference in chemical composition be considered?' These questions are currently being hashed over by the scientists. Toxicology done with Libby Amphibole in its more natural state only, may result in faster answers, however, these answers may be inconclusive leaving many more questions as a result. We should start seeing toxicology results that will provide answers as to acceptable exposure levels in early to mid 2010.

A longer-term research program that will help to better understand the long-term

effects of low-level and short-term exposure, to humans, of Libby Amphibole Asbestos is also planned. This will study the effects, over years, of Libby Amphibole on folks who had low-level and short-term exposure in the 80's and 90's. This will be ongoing into the next decade.

Dosimetry is the combined information, from all the scientific studies, that will answer the question we are all asking, 'when will we be safe?' It looks as if the last quarter of 2010 is when there will be enough information to establish a dosimetry model that can answer this question.

LATAG assumes four possibilities at that time:

1. **The cleanup is being done correctly, and EPA can begin to focus on other aspects of the Libby Superfund Site.**
2. **The cleanup has not been done correctly, and EPA will need to backup and do certain elements of the cleanup again.**
3. **We get a clean bill of health - period!**
4. **The EPA determines that the science is non-conclusive and will require more analytical thought.**

It is LATAG's goal to make sure the science continues as per the timeline and to look at any snags that may pop up, to be the watchdog for the community, and advise the community as to the progress and/or problems with the science. If there is a place where delays in getting a clean bill of health can occur, the science is the most likely culprit. This is also the place where the government is most likely to stall progress and delay decisions for political reasons. LATAG encourages your involvement and questions. Please contact any member with questions about LATAG and/or the EPA cleanup process. Congress made public involvement in decision-making an important part of the Superfund process when the TAG program was established by the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) of 1980.

LATAG meets the second Tuesday of the month at the Community College at 7pm. Many of the meetings focus on interesting presentations by the EPA or other experts. We are currently seeking new members from Libby and Troy to serve on our board of directors. LATAG is a non-profit organization established as a community resource to ensure that the people whose lives are affected by hazardous wastes have a say in the actions used to clean their properties. For more information contact the LATAG secretary at 293-6407, write us at PO Box 53 Libby, MT 59923 or check out our new website at www.latag.org.

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